



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Human Rights in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Douglas A. Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 13, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The U.S. is pleased to see that the lifting of prior censorship by the Government of Uzbekistan last year has led to increased press activity in that country. We have hoped to see continuing development toward a fully free press.

In that regard, we are therefore gravely concerned at the harassment, attempted intimidation, and, in some cases, imprisonment of journalists over the past several months.

For example, Olim Toshev was arrested in early February and released shortly thereafter on bail. He is editor of a police newspaper in Karshi and has also reported for foreign radio. He is charged with assaulting a neighbor, a charge he denies. The real reason for his arrest seems to have been his reporting on police corruption and illegal practices.

A secure and democratic society requires that citizens, including journalists, have the freedom to express their views without fear of official harassment or politically motivated prosecution.

We therefore urge Uzbek authorities to respect the freedom of the press and the rights of independent journalists, investigate potential abuses by local authorities, and to demonstrate their commitment to the rule of law. Doing so will allow Uzbekistan to take full advantage of its important step in lifting prior censorship.

Finally, I would also like to report that we are encouraged by the reports of the release of hundreds of political prisoners following the December 8, 2002 amnesty. In particular, we welcome the release of Yuldash Rasulov, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, and Komil Bekjonov.

We hope the Government of Uzbekistan will continue to work with the OSCE and other with international organizations on judicial reform and reform of the prison system.

Thank you.